

Reading Toolkit: Grade 7 Objective 3.A.5.c

Standard 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text

Topic A. Comprehension of Literary Text

Indicator 5. Analyze elements of drama to facilitate understanding and interpretation

Objective c. Analyze how stage directions affect dialogue, characters, and plot

Assessment Limits:

Connections between the stage directions and the movement of the characters

Connections between the stage directions and the movement of the characters

Connection between the stage directions and how and what the character says

Connection between the stage directions and how and what the character says

Interrelationships among stage directions, dialogue, and plot

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Clarification

Reading Grade 7 Indicator 3.A.5

To show proficiency of the skills stated in this indicator, a reader will demonstrate an understanding of the elements of drama which are the components through which drama is structured and composed. Knowing the structure of drama and its components helps the reader to comprehend a narrative being told in a different way. When a reader is able to analyze the structure and all the elements of drama, he/she is able to perceive the complexities of this literary form.

In order to identify drama as a literary form and be able to distinguish among types of plays, a reader must identify and use a play's structural features. A play is purposefully written to be performed by actors and actresses in front of an audience. The play's story is relayed to the audience through the players' dialogues and actions. Using the play's structural and organizational features helps a reader set a purpose for reading that enables a reader to analyze the interrelatedness of each of these components and develop a full understanding and appreciation of this literary form.

Structural Features

A cast is a list of characters who are the people or animals that speak and perform the play. The cast list often briefly describes each character and how they are related to each other.

A narrator is generally an inactive role in a play. The narrator's comments often explain or move along the action of the play.

A setting of a play is information about the time and place of a play's action. The setting is usually described in stage directions or at the beginning of each scene.

The stage directions are written explanations of the time and place of the play as well as instructions about how actors and actresses should speak their lines.

A dialogue is the conversation between and among characters in a play.

A monologue is a speech by one character that is alone on the stage. A monologue is an important, dramatic moment because all attention is focused on a single character.

A prologue is an introductory speech or poem addressed to an audience at the beginning of a play.

The props are objects used in plays to create the setting of the play.

The scenery is the background screens or hangings used to create places or setting of plays.

The staging of a play is the placement and movements of characters on the stage during the play.

The lighting of a play is the focus of lights to draw attention to a single actor or a group of actors or the color mixture of the lights to create indoor/outdoor light or a time of day.

The sound effects in a play are created offstage to duplicate the normal sounds of the play's setting.

An act in a play is a major division comprised of two or more scenes.

A scene in a play is a smaller division within an act of a play. The time or setting or both may change with each scene change.

The production notes in a play are instructions to the cast after a performance that are designed to help the players better perform their roles.

To fully comprehend drama, a reader must have an understanding of the organization of plays into scenes and acts and be able to connect these structural features to the advancement of the plot of the play. During the reading of a play, a critical reader should note the important events in each scene and the characters involved with those events. After reading the complete play, a critical reader should review each scene to determine a climax or turning point in the play and determine the connection between and among each scene. Further a critical reader should be able to explain why the divisions between and among the acts and scenes fall where they do.

Reading the stage directions is as important as reading the dialogue between and among the characters in a play. These stage directions give a reader important information about the movements, facial expressions, tone of voice, and thereby the emotions of characters. In addition, the stage directions can indicate details of the setting including the mood, specific character actions within the setting, and indications why the character/s is present in that scene or act. For a reader, stage directions define how characters should speak and provide that blending of character, setting and mood that create character action and speech that are believable to an audience or a reader. At their simplest level stage directions help a reader visualize the action of a play, but at a more complex level they offer insight into character motivation which becomes the basis for the advancement of the plot of the play.

Because drama is a performance art, dialogue becomes extremely important in revealing character personality, values, and thought. So when reading a play, the "reader's voice" moving from character to character becomes a critical component in fully understanding drama. Character dialogue simultaneously holds the plot together while advancing the play's action. A critical reader can analyze the stage directions, dialogue, and plot to see the connection among each and how they work together to advance the plot to establish plausibility in a reader's mind, fulfill a playwright's purpose, and connect to social, historical, or political standards of the play's time period.